

GLOUCESTER RUGBY HERITAGE

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# A TRIBUTE TO HARRY BERRY AND HARRY BARNES

One hundred years ago today the only Gloucester international rugby player to die in the Great War, Henry 'Harry' Berry, was killed in action on 9th May 1915, during the Battle of Aubers Ridge. Herbert Henry 'Harry' Barnes, his Gloucester teammate, was also killed this day in the same battle. We salute them both.

## Harry Berry

Harry Berry was born in Gloucester in 1883, the son of a dock labourer. He spent his early years at 42 Columbia Street, before joining the British Army in 1899 at the age of sixteen to fight in the Second Boer War (1899-1902). Initially he served with the 4th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment guarding Boer prisoners on the island of St Helena but in 1902 was transferred to the 2nd Battalion and fought in mainland South Africa. After the war he was sent to India and spent five years there with the 1st Battalion before returning to Gloucester and civilian life in 1907, although he still remained an army reservist. He was an innkeeper, initially at the Red Lion, Northgate Street, and later at the Stag's Head, Alvin Street.

Having experienced army rugby, he joined the Gloucester Club and played his first game for the 1st XV against Leicester on 14th December 1907. After a few games on the wing, he was moved to wing forward, where he proved to be a fast and clever player who particularly shone in the lineout



Harry Berry

and in loose footwork. As a result his career blossomed. Over the next five seasons, 1908-1913, he made 136 appearances and scored 24 tries.

His talent was quickly noticed by the Gloucestershire selectors and he won the first of his 19 County caps against the Australian tourists at Kingsholm on 1st October 1908. With his assistance

Gloucestershire secured its first ever County Championship in 1910 with a 23-0 victory over Yorkshire at Kingsholm.

1910 would prove to be a momentous rugby year for Harry as he won four England International caps, scoring two tries (against France and Scotland) as well as playing in the inaugural game at Twickenham which resulted in victory over Wales, for the first time in twelve years. England won the Five Nations Championship, their first since 1892.

The Citizen's rugby correspondent (W.B.) summed up Harry's season – "H Berry fully sustained his reputation, and the ex-soldier deservedly gained the coveted cap. That the Gloucester man was able to retain his place in the face of so many changes made in the International side was clear evidence of the Committee's appreciation of his abilities."

The other main event in Harry's life in 1910 was that in January he married Beatrice Arnold from Chepstow and the couple would go on to have two children, Henry George (b.1911) and Phyllis Irene

Harry Berry's caps for Gloucestershire, England and Gloucester





(b.1915); sadly Harry would not live to see his daughter.

By the end of the 1912-13 season Harry was forced to retire from the game owing to a recurrence of a bout of malaria, a disease contracted during his spell in India; this affected Harry's health to the extent that he never played for Gloucester again.

### Harry Barnes

Harry Barnes was born in Gloucester in 1888, the son of a blacksmith, and grew up in Millbrook Street. Harry played his first game for Gloucester against Cardiff on 3rd April 1909, and scored two tries on his second appearance against Castleford five days later. Harry played at centre and went on to make 38 appearances for the 1st XV, scoring 13 tries and kicking 2 drop goals. In February 1911 he



Harry Barnes

travelled with Harry Berry on a six-day trip to Toulouse, where they both helped Gloucester to beat Stade Toulousain 18-13. His final game was away at Northampton on 8th April 1911.

### Aubers Ridge

When war was declared in August 1914, Harry Berry and Harry Barnes were reservists and both were recalled to the Colours in the 1st Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, Berry as a Corporal and Barnes as a Private. They landed together at Boulogne on 2nd February 1915 on their way to the Western Front. This same draft included fellow Gloucester players, Albert 'Car' Cummings (stand off), Charles Rose (front row) and Fred Goulding (second row).

After a spell of front line duty the Battalion was assigned to the reserve line ('second wave') for the attack at Aubers Ridge on 9th May 1915. At 5.30 am the first wave which launched the attack met with stiff resistance and heavy machine gun fire so after a second artillery bombardment the 1st Gloucesters together with the 1st South Wales Borderers were ordered over the top. Harry's friend, Thomas Priday later recalled that in the moments before the whistles blew, "...we shook hands with one another... [and].. we kissed the photos of

our wives and children before we made the charge..."

As well as enemy activity the second wave now had to contend with the dead and the wounded from the first wave which littered no man's land. The assaulting lines of the 1st Gloucesters and the 1st South Wales Borderers advanced eighty yards before the intensity of the fire forced them to lie down and seek whatever cover was available.

The bodies of Harry Berry (age 32) and Harry Barnes (age 27), were never recovered. They are commemorated on Le Touret Memorial in northern France. They are also commemorated on the Gloucester War Memorial and the Gloucester Club's two war memorials – one now situated in the Lions Den, unveiled in 1920, and the other on the Stadium outside reception, unveiled in 2013.

We are delighted to welcome to Kingsholm today Michael Berry and Peter Berry, grandsons of Harry Berry, and Sue Horton and her mother, Doreen, who are descended from Harry's sister Clara.

For more information, see [www.gloucesterrugbyheritage.org.uk](http://www.gloucesterrugbyheritage.org.uk) for the rugby careers of the two Harrys, and 'They played for Gloucester and fought for their country', available from the Gloucester Rugby shop and Hudsons Sports, for their military records.